A Man of Destiny

THE STORY OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

An Epic Poem

BY

ERNEST
LINWOOD
STAPLES

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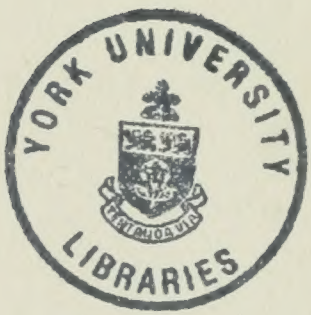
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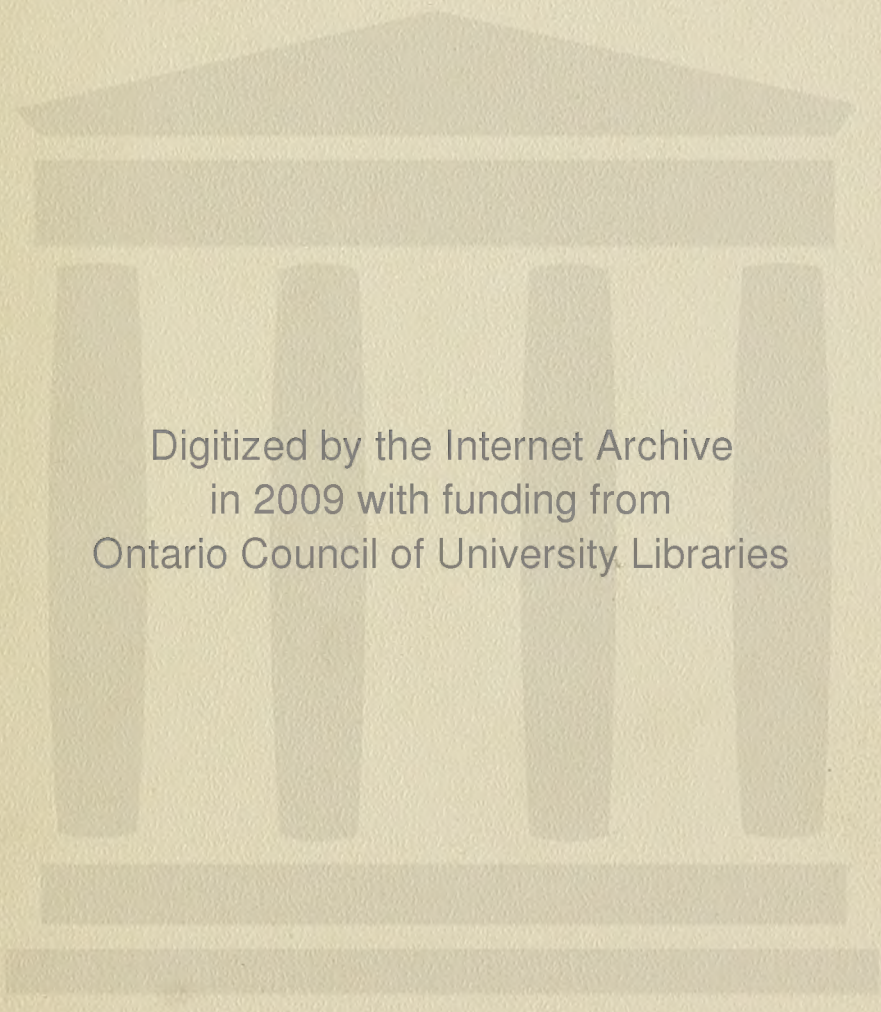
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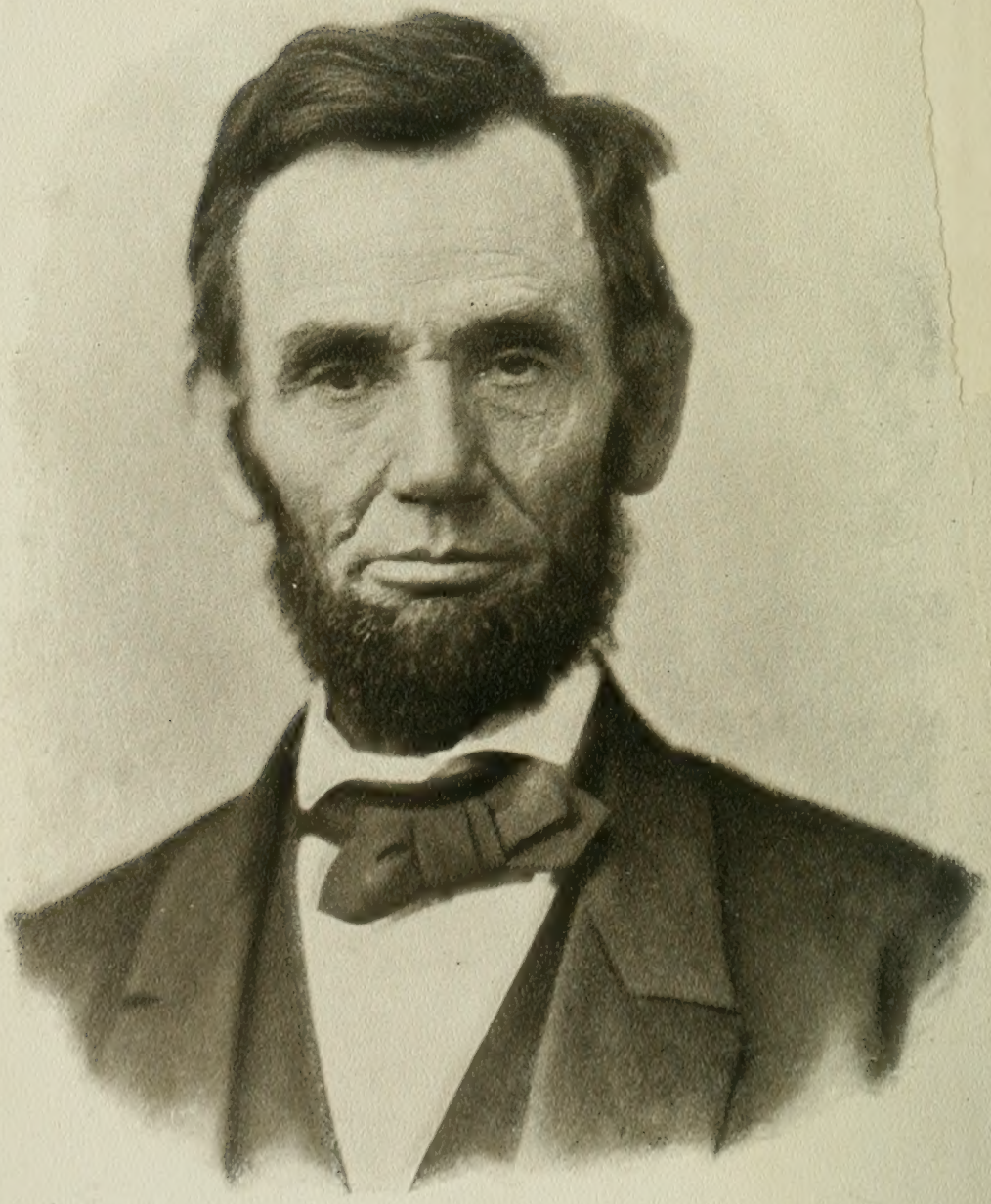

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

A Man of Destiny

BEING THE

Story of Abraham Lincoln

An Epic Poem

By

ERNEST LINWOOD STAPLES.

His heart was as great as the world, but there was no room in it to hold the memory of a wrong. — *Emerson.*

We rest in peace where these sad eyes
Saw peril, strife, and pain;
His was the nation's sacrifice,
And ours the priceless gain.
— *Whittier.*

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PREFACE.

All will admit that the story of Abraham Lincoln is one of the most remarkable in the history of the human race. His is a unique character, worthy to be made the subject of a grand Epic whenever the inspired genius shall appear who is worthy to write our national poem.

No critic will more readily concede than the author the failure of these lines to do justice to the martyred President whose life they commemorate. Yet if by their imperfections they provoke some master spirit to sing his worth, in fitting verse, they will not have been written in vain.

For whatever of inspiration there may be in these pages, the author freely acknowledges his deep indebtedness to others, especially Messrs. Herndon and Weik, the version in whose inimitable Life of Lincoln he has closely followed, believing that the near friend and partner of Lincoln must have been among the best qualified to write the story of his precious life.

SHELTON, CONN., NOV. 7, 1902.

To My Loyal Wife

MY COMPANION IN JOY AND SORROW,

BUT FOR WHOSE INSPIRATION THESE LINES WOULD NEVER

HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

I Dedicate This Little Volume.

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ANCESTRY AND CHILDHOOD.

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A MAN OF DESTINY.

PROLOGUE.

ALONE, mysterious character wert thou,
The revelation of thyself withheld,
So that no mortal ever knew thee well;
Yet many judged thee by the glimpse they caught
And drew the pictures strangely opposite.
The gamut of all feeling thou didst sweep,
Upon thy soul did each emotion play;
Thou wert the incarnation of each spell
That rests upon the human spirit strange.
A sphynx-like man, of many, many moods,
Unique, and ever still inscrutable!
This do we know—that thou wert wise and good,
Kind as a woman in thy manly power.

A MAN OF DESTINY.

BOOK I.

I SING the worth and fame of him we love,
The foremost of Columbia's noble sons;
His lowly birth to penury and toil,
His life sublime, the Nation's heritage,
His tragic death and solemn destiny.

Forth from Virginia, long ago, there passed
One Abraham, a sturdy pioneer,
Through forests dark, o'er streams unbridged and deep,
To the Kentucky glebe, whereon he built
His cabin in the solemn, sombre shade.
Unwelcome were the pale-faced pioneers;
And while they felled the trees and broke the sod,
Or threw the dam athwart the flowing stream,
The dusky Indian, lurking stealthily,
Watched all their motions with a jealous eye.
Three sons had Abraham—thus were they named:
Josiah, Thomas, and brave Mordecai—
Who grew to be plain, honest, candid men;
And, having played their humble role in life,
Passed through the mystery that men call death,
Into the vast unknown beyond the grave.

When Thomas was but six years old, it chanced
The father, working in the field, was shot
By a wild savage, and fell down to die

In agony. Dying, he blessed his son
With a deep love; but wist not that the child
Should link his life to one of deathless fame.
Then Mordecai, with his sure rifle, aimed
Between the logs of the old cabin house,
At a bright crescent on the Indian's breast,
And felled him to the ground in stern revenge;
The younger brother rescued, who became
The father of the Hero yet unborn,
Whose greatness lifts his ancestry to view.

Now, roving, shiftless, so the legends say,
Was Thomas, Esau-like, a luckless one.
They who believe in destiny would say
He was an ill-starred man, like Sisera,
And in their course the stars against him fought.
The rolling stone to others he appeared,
That rolling ever fails to find the moss.
But whatsoe'er the cause, such was his fate;
And so he wandered on from place to place,
Like Ponce de Leon, to die at last
A weary nomad in a land of flowers.

The legends further say that he was tall,
With rounded face and eyes of hazel hue,
Hair like an Indian's and a mind inert.
By nature placid as a rock-bound pool,
But angered, like a tempest was his wrath.
All kinds of tales he loved, likewise the chase,
And, like his neighbors, hated not the cup
Wherein was poured in hospitality
The fragrant whiskey of the Blue Grass State.
By trade a carpenter, he tilled the soil
Unskilfully, like those who watch the clouds,
And reaped scant harvests from the virgin soil.

His name he could not write nor could he read,
Till Nancy Hanks, whose heart and hand he won,
Taught him the priceless art, so he could plod
His way with care the Holy Bible through,
Learning a simple faith in which he lived
And died, in hope of immortality.

Of Nancy Hanks the early annals say
She was a comely maid with genial heart
And ways; a fair brunette with Grecian face,
And such a look of tender sadness there
That none who ever saw her could forget
The melancholy of her countenance.
Strange was the ancestry from which she sprang,
Nomadic, superstitious, ignorant,
And weird the atmosphere in which she lived
A life that hid a solemn mystery.

Within the sombre forest, dense and still,
Behold a group of worshipers draw near.
All are assembled; then a hymn they sing;
A fervid sermon follows after prayer.
They shout until in ecstasy and trance
They call the man and maiden to the march.
Lo, comes the man, athletic, strong, and young,
And stands one side the altar, while the maid
Upon the other side appears and waits.
The people sing, the man and maid advance,
Up to the center of the altar rude,
Embracing fondly whom they chance to meet,
Singing and shouting, moving gracefully.

Such were the scenes where Nancy Hanks was born,
In the camp-meetings of those early days.
Now, when the march was ended, whispered one:

"She will be married ere the month hath flown,
This maiden, for in love her heart and hand
Hath the young lover, faithful suitor, won."
Perchance the twain who in their ecstasy
Walked o'er that camp-field, in the forest still,
Were to become the parents of the Great
Emancipator who should come to break
The fetters of a race oppressed, and set
Them "*then, thenceforward, and forever free*"! *

After the marriage came maternity,
With mother-love unutterable, deep,
And the strange ecstasy that comes to her
Who, for the first time, feels her infant's life
And hears the beating of a new-made heart.
If there were angels keeping watch beside
God's children then, as in the days of old,
When over Bethlehem there hung a star
Of wondrous brightness, which the Magi saw
And followed to the cradle of the Christ,
Well had they sung anew the anthem sweet,
"Glory to God on high, and peace on earth,"
O'er the Kentucky infant Abraham.

The little lad who bore his grandsire's name
Passed quickly on to childhood, those sweet days
When all things seem enchanted, yet so real,
We never lose the vision beautiful
E'en in the twilight of a long, long life.
No miracle was there to mark the child
Of awful fate and destiny sublime;
No oracle proclaimed his mission vast;
Around the mother's head no halo shone;

* *Cf.* Emancipation Proclamation.

Only a common lad he seemed to men,
As with his mother to the village store
He went, and, seated there upon a keg,
A lump of sugar sucked contentedly;
Or, later still, in terror turned to school,
There taught by one who scarce could read or write,
A frontier pedagogue, with look severe,
Conveying inspiration with the rod
Of hickory, or young witch-hazel lithe;
Or, as in play-days he, with iron hook,
Dragged forth the ground-hog from his hiding place,
Or trapped the coons where silken cornfields waved.

The father, Thomas, restless grew meanwhile,
Loathed the Kentucky soil, and longed to go
To Indiana prairies rich and vast.
"No home is this, for a poor man", he said.
"Sterile the land; 'tis but a barren glade;
No longer will I toil thereon to earn,
With sweating brow, a scanty livelihood.
My brother Mordecai, the first-born son,
Inherited my father's small estate,"
(Such was the law in those colonial days),
"While penniless am I and nothing gain.
O'er fairer fields let me my sickle swing."
Such his decision; then he fell to work;
A crude craft made, and floated down the stream,
The Rolling Fork, to the Ohio bank.
There steered he forth in the great river's flood.
But, poorly built, the boat was overturned,
And all its contents in the waters plunged;
His implements and personal effects,
And, with the rest, ten forty-gallon casks
Of bartered whiskey, chief of all his wealth,

Sank in the rolling tide that luckless day.
Yet all undaunted was the pioneer,
And wrested from the water's grasp his tools,
Much of the whiskey; and set out again
For Indiana, seeking a new home,
At Thomson's Ferry landing, safe and sound.

Six and ten miles above the river's brink
He found a place to which his heart inclined,
And hasted to Vincennes, and title took;
Then back and blazed the trees to mark the bounds,
And piled the brush at either corner high.
Back to Kentucky slowly then he strode,
Wending his way alone, in pathless wood,
Drawn thither by the love of wife and child.

Resting awhile with Nancy, sorrowful,
They twain set forth into the wilderness.
O, not again was she to look upon
The sacred scenes of childhood, and the spot
Made holy by the touch of sweet romance,
That comes to youth, but never comes again.
Perchance from her gray eye there fell a tear;
Perchance a sigh breathed from her heaving breast;
The legends say not. This we only know,
Sad Nancy Lincoln nevermore returned.

They slowly picked their way through forests dense,
Till on the banks of little Pigeon Creek
They halted and began a home to build
In the deep shade primeval, the abode
Of beasts untamed by men, alert and wild,
The darkness loving better than the day.
A little "half-faced" cabin first they built,

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HOUSE IN WHICH LINCOLN WAS BORN.

But later this they gave to old-time friends
Who from Kentucky came to cast their lot
And share with them the joys and sorrows all;
Then builded better, though a cabin rude,
Whose length and breadth, like the fair city seen
By John of Patmos, equal were, 'tis said.
There in the loft slept little Abe at night,
And climbed to bed on pegs fixed in the wall,
Like Jack the Giant-Killer up the stalk,
To dream sweet dreams while panthers howled without.
Inside, the furnishings were rustic, rude:
Three-legged stools in place of chairs had they,
Bedsteads of saplings made, rough and unhewn;
For covers, skins of beasts and garments old;
Some pewter dishes, one Dutch oven quaint,
And a small skillet,—these were all they had
Of household implements in the new home.

Here 'twas the lot of little Abe to pass
The years of boyhood, springtime of his life.
Scrimp were the rations of the cabin home,
And once, 'tis said, when Thomas offered thanks
For daily blessings, that the lad broke forth,
O'er the potatoes plain, their only food,—
"Dad, I should call these blessings mighty poor."
Oft went he to the mill and ground by hand
With weary toil the flour, unbolted, black;
Helped in the household, did the little chores
That often fall to boyhood's golden days.
Yet not unhappy was his early life;
For him the wild bird sang its merry lay,
The brooklet babbled, and the breezes blew
The forest fragrance through the leafy wood;

The light and shadow fell upon his path;
Through emerald vistas azure skies he saw;
By night, the constellations passed in view;
All Nature's panorama he beheld,
The ceaseless anthem of creation heard,
And grew in wisdom as he grew in years.
Then there were dear companionships of youth,
The loves of childhood, sweet, ingenuous;
There, by his side, a little sister played,
The partner of his sorrows and his joys.

Too poor was he to own a book at school,
So made his own arithmetic from leaves
Of coarsest paper, wherein he did write
The kinds of weights, the measures, and the "sums",
As they were called by the unlearned folk;
And on one leaf facetiously did scrawl
This simple rhyme, in uncouth letters spelled:—
"Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen,
He will be good, but God knows when."
A prophecy, unconsciously proclaimed,
For he was good, in the rich after years,
Honest and true alike to God and men.

Then fell a pall of sadness o'er the place,
And pestilence stalked boldly through the land,
An unknown malady. Some quickly died,
Some lingered on for days, and some for years.
To man and beast it came, a solemn blight,
And scarce a house was there without its dead.
Then came the plague into the Lincoln home
And laid its fevered hand on Nancy's brow;
So, day by day, the sad, sweet mother grew
More helpless till she saw at night the form
Of the death angel, that weird messenger

Who comes alike to all on land or sea,
At the appointed hour to lead the soul
Into the region of the land unknown;
Then, knowing that the hour was drawing nigh
When she must pass into the world unseen,
She called the boy and girl beside her bed
Whereon she feebly lay; the children knelt,
And thus she blessed them with a mother's love.
Her wasted hand upon his head she placed
And prayed the boy be kind unto his sire
And sister; begged them both to love the good;
The deathless hope she breathed that they might come
To dwell together in the Father's home
On high. So from the wilderness she passed
Into the mystery that lies beyond,
Where none are sad and death shall be no more.

Her dust they buried in the solitude.
No priest was there to close her eyes in death,
Or speak of life and immortality
Above the coffin rude and open grave.
But later, ere the winter months had passed,
Did David Elkin chance to go that way,
Preacher itinerant, whom Nancy knew
In her Kentucky home, and o'er her grave
Spoke kindly words and true of her dear life;
How she her work in the new land had done,
Where God had placed her, uncomplainingly,
Her way in sadness groping with no hope
Of any brighter day in her dark life,
And silently her frailties passed o'er,
Exhorting all who listened thus to live
Unselfish lives and make the world more bright.

Then unto Abraham and Sarah came
Days of unutterable loneliness,
And dismal nights, void of a mother's love.
The cold winds wailed around the cabin door,
Before the wintry blasts the big boughs creaked,
Around the new-made grave the wan wolf howled,
While from the dying embers on the hearth
The sickly light weird, spectral shadows threw
Upon the bolted door, till they could see
In fancy, standing there, sad-eyed and still,
One who had blessed them with her dying breath.
Then would the sister say to Abraham,
"It is our mother blessing us again."
Whereat the boy would open his great eyes
In wonder, gazing long into the dark,
Then whisper, "Sister, yes, I see, I see,
It is our mother, though she speaketh not."
Then would they sit in silence till the fire
Had smoldered into ashes, and the wind
Subsided, speaking not, till side by side
They gently fell asleep to dream of her.

BOOK II.

SCARCE had a year passed by e'er Thomas, lone,
For Nancy mourning, sought another bride,
And in his tender passion turned again
To old Kentucky, well remembering
How in the former days he sought in vain
The hand of Sally Bush, years later wed
To Daniel Johnston, keeper of the keys
Of Hardin County jail, now dead and mourned
By his true wife, a woman excellent.
Uncouth was Thomas, simple in his ways;
Unlike the stalwart Standish, none had he
With gifted eloquence to plead his cause
And win unconsciously a lovely bride
Not for his client, but himself instead.
So bluntly spake he thus: "Mis' Johnston, I
Am wifeless. You no husband have. I knowed
You from a gal, and you as well knowed me.
I came a purpose here to marry you.
I have no time to lose, so let it be,
If you are willin', ere the sun has set."
Surprised, she thus made answer:—"Not till I
Pay first the debts I owe to the kind friends
Who in my widowhood have helped me keep
The wolf of want from children fatherless."
Then, say the legends, Thomas learned their names
To whom the widow owed the little debts,
And straightway paid them all, so that next day
The marriage bells rang out right merrily.

To Indiana slowly went the twain
Who now were one in sight of God and man.
They brought with them into the lonely home
The products of her thrift and industry,
And little luxuries unknown before
To children now no longer motherless.
Stately in bearing, fluent in her speech,
Hard-working, kind, and helpful unto all,
She was a benediction in the home.
Through all the years she cared for Abraham,
E'en as a mother for her only son,
Taught him to love the good and hate the wrong,
And live the precept of the Golden Rule.
Prophetic grew her vision in old age;
Her mother heart could read the destiny
Of Abraham, and tearfully she prayed,
"Oh, enter not the lists of those who strive
For leadership and more than kingly power."
But all unheeded were her warning words;
He strove, and victory upon him smiled.
Then, when she looked upon her son elect,
The same dark spell came over her again —
An intuition, deep, mysterious;
The oracle within her heart declared,
"Some dire calamity will him befall
And we shall look upon his face no more."
Then from her presence Abraham went forth,
And passed no more before her wistful eyes.
Whence came these voices to her listening soul?
This strange foreboding of the coming ill?
Who drew the picture dark and terrible
Which her clear eye could see unerringly?
What unseen finger touched the secret chord
Of her sweet sympathy so that it thrilled

With waking sense of sorrow imminent?
Perchance from the "cold, barren peaks beyond,"
From the unknown abyss beneath the grave,
The awful darkness and the rayless gloom,
The spirit of sad Nancy Hanks came forth,
Revealed unto the foster mother there
In a strange language, only audible,
In a strange vision, only visible,
In a weird presence, only manifest
In the old home to her responsive soul.

The years passed swiftly by, and Abraham
Waxed strong like Samson and old Hercules.
He restless grew, and scorned the dull routine
Of boyish labor, lusting much to be
Emancipated from paternal rule.
Anon, like Kwasind, playful in his strength,
Great burdens he would lift, or with the maul
Drive the axe deeply in the trunk of some
Old monarch of the forest, gnarled and tough.
None could withstand him in the tournament
Of wrestlers strong, none in the field so wide
A swath could mow, none in the forest split
So many rails, or bear so great a load.
He was the leader in all manly sports,
And in his seventeenth year a full-grown man.

Quaint were the customs of that frontier life;
Men dressed in deerskin pants and moccasins,
Coarse hunting shirts tied up with leather straps,
And loaded muskets ready for attack,
(Their good wives riding on the trusted steeds),
Would often walk a full ten miles to church,
Held in some rude log cabin of the wood.
There, long before the hour of service came,

Adventures thrilling would they each relate,
Exploits of hunting, Indian escapades,
And smoke meantime a friendly pipe of peace,
While slighting not the much-loved brandy bowl.
Then, the itinerant, fearless and sincere,
Would take the stand and preach with energy,
Accredited the messenger of God.
The sermon ended, then they sang a hymn,
Shook hands and parted for another week,
Wherein God blessed their humble life of toil.
Anon, to some log-rolling would they go
Great distances; or to the dance would trip,
Bare-footed maidens with their shoes in hand
Unworn until the festive scene was reached;
There danced they merrily the whole night long,
To simple tunes by rustic player whipped
From the hoarse fiddle, with his swinging bow.
Though joyous in their thrift and full of mirth,
Yet superstitious were the people all;
Believed in magic, feared the witch's sway,
And shot her image with a silver ball,
To break the baneful thraldom of her spell.
There was the water wizard with his wand,
Who traced the hidden streamlet's silent flow;
There the mysterious doctor, who, by songs
And signals strange, could exorcise disease;
All these the people followed faithfully,
Like their red brothers, who of old had danced
Their powwows in the same primeval wood.

If through the window then a wild bird flew,
Or if the horse's breath fell on the head
Of a dear child, or if the hunter's dog
His pathway crossed, all this betokened ill.

In the moon's waxing light their rails they split,
Planted potatoes when the orb withdrew;
On Friday nothing started could succeed,
And only mischief follow in its train;
All dreams were full of prophecy to them.
But some there were, indeed, who held a faith
Likewise in destiny; that somehow God
Had foreordained whatever is to be.
And colored by such thought was Lincoln's soul.

Then fell again the plague upon the place,
The fearful "milk sick", killing man and beast!
Men lost their courage, and looked wistfully
Out from the windows of their cabin homes,
And longed to go to some far distant land,
Thus to avoid the pestilential breath.
Then some who lately passed to Illinois,
Returning like the spies to Israel,
Brought with them glowing stories of the land,
Its healthful climate, and its fertile soil,
And urged their brothers thitherward to go.

These spake to Thomas, restless as of yore:—
"Come to the fairer fields of Illinois,
Come where the virgin soil awaits thy plow,
Come lest the blight should cast its withering shade,
And darken home and heart with loneliness."
So, quickly Thomas sold his land and stock,
His oxen harnessed to a ponderous cart,
Wherein his household goods were snugly packed,
And journeyed slowly westward with his kin,
Thirteen in all, and with them Abraham,
Now twenty-one, a lank and awkward youth,
But mellow-hearted as a maiden mild.
It was the springtime; scarcely had the buds

Awakened from the sleep of wintry months;
Oft did the path congeal o'er which they trod.
Bridgeless the streams before them deeply flowed,
The rivers many which they forded through;
And once, it chanced, they looking back upon
The farther shore saw, shivering in fear
Thereon, the whimpering cur which Thomas brought
With them, afraid to swim the current cold,
And howling wildly in his misery.
In vain his prayer fell on the ears of all
Save Abraham the merciful, who turned,
And, while his kinsmen forward moved, strode back
To ford the stream again, and brought the brute
In safety through the Red Sea of its fear.

So kind was he, his eyes could ne'er behold
Unfeelingly pain in the humblest thing;
And once again, the legends say, his path
Lay near a mire wherein had sunk a sow,
Which struggled vainly, as he passed, to rise.
In carelessness he forward thought to go,
But a strong impulse tugging at his heart
Forbade his progress; then he turned again,
Moved by deep sympathy for the poor wretch,
And rescued her. Thus moved he on the way
Of humble duty, making glad the heart
Of man and beast; thus onward through the years
Of preparation passed he consecrate, —
Anointed by the hand of Providence —
To the great sacrifice, the martyrdom
Of his dear self to free his fellow man.
Oh, is not life all one in man and brute?

No thing is dead in all the universe:
Behold, the senseless clod is animate,
The cold stone vibrates with vitality,
All things do live, each is a part of all;
The common life flows through the cosmic whole.
Then marvel not that lofty souls may stoop
In tenderness to help the humblest thing;
That deepest hearts feel most the mystic tie
That binds all things that be, in unity.
Behold, the soul of man is all divine
And its heredity from the great God!
We are not worms, doomed ever to the dust,
But embryonic angels, working out
The triumph of the spirit o'er the clay
In the long spiral of ascending life.

Long was the journey into Illinois,
But patiently they plodded slowly on,
And in the fullness of the time arrived
Within the borders of the Prairie State,
Selecting for their home a pleasant bluff
That overlooks the charming Sangamon.
Here Thomas for a while ambitious grew,
And with the aid of others felled the trees,
Then built a cabin like the one of yore;
Broke up the glebe and planted fields of maize,
While Abraham, in buckskin breeches clad,
And coon-skin cap upon his forehead high,
Split monstrous rails and fenced the heritage.

Oh, little did they dream who saw him then
Their eyes beheld a future president,
So marv'lous is the strange kaleidoscope
Of Providence and human destiny!

Yet, not content, the migratory soul
Of Thomas rested not, but ere he died
Thrice westward moved. Till an old man he lived
At Farmington, and there gave up the ghost,
Devoid of earthly gain, but hoping still
Beyond the grave to find a better land.

To Abraham the years brought little strange:
Long hours of labor, days of honest toil,
Succeeding precious nights, in which he read
With great avidity whatever books
The frontier yielded to his thirsty mind,
Trudging uncounted miles in quest of them.
Then burned ambition's flame within his breast;
He longed for greatness, conscious of his power.
There oft in solitude would he address
Majestic trees and unreplying stumps;
His audience, the forest dark and still,
With multitudes his fancy brought to view,
And spirits of the world invisible.
Perchance, beside him there stood Nancy Hanks,
Proud of her son, and with a mother's love
Inspired in him the strong desire to rise,
That led him on into the halls of State.
As from Olympus to the Grecians came
The ancient gods to counsel and inspire,
So from the silent realm may come to us
The angel forms we fondly loved of yore,
The friends unseen, to aid us in life's fray.

In Springfield, but a frontier hamlet then,
There stood an ancient inn, known, from the sign
Of a buck's head that swung above the door,
As "The Buckhorn", and here the genial host
Welcomed his many guests with hearty cheer.

Here with one Offut met young Abraham,
A busy man and venturesome withal,
Of boats possessed, which plied the Sangamon,
And sailed sometimes far down to New Orleans.
Tired of the woods and chafing to be free,
Strong Abraham was glad then to engage
To float a cargo southward to the Gulf
In Offut's service, he to have the boat
For launching ready in a fortnight's time.
So, longing for a vision of the world,
The gaunt, unpolished rustic homeward turned,
Anticipating what the trip should bring,
Bright castles building in the springtime air,
Ambitious to become a craftsman skilled,
And bring her safely to the southern port.
Now when the time was ripe did Abraham
With his companions to the Buckhorn come,
And finding Offut there inquired of him
About the boat, and where she lay, and when
They should begin their voyage to the Gulf.
Then first learned they that Offut, fond of drink,
The craft had not prepared as he agreed,
But, rather, spent the time in telling tales,
And quaffing whiskey with the hangers-on.
Thereat the men were disappointed much;
But all resolved not to give up the trip,
And so agreed with Offut they would build
Themselves a boat, he to employ them all
To make the voyage. Then they fell to work,
Cut down the sturdy trees, full-circled, old,
And built a craft whereon they placed the goods
Of Offut, and with great success set forth
Adown the stream, proud of their enterprise.

Great was the launching of the little craft;
The crowd was there to see her maiden plunge
Into the waters of the Sangamon.
There lauded they the Whigs, and Jackson too,
And some disputed as to politics;
Then did this Abraham, a statesman born,
Who for his rostrum had an o'erturned box,
Discuss the issues of that early day
So wisely well that they who listened said,
"Behold the leader of a future age."

They glided smoothly on and quickly reached
New Salem with its thrifty, happy homes
(Now vanished, but in loving hearts enshrined),
And little dreamed the place had much in store
For Abraham. Here ran the boat aground
On Rutledge mill-dam and hung helplessly,
So, long and hard, they toiled to set her free,
Unloading and reloading her in haste.

There mightily did Abraham acquit
Himself in Offut's presence, so the man
Declared aloud unto the multitude
That he a boat would build, with wheels to plow
The Sangamon, and roll o'er obstacles,
With Abe for Captain. So cried he again
And lustily, "By Neptune! then she'd go."

So down the Sangamon and Illinois
They floated, with a sail made part of plank
And part of faded cloth, and rudely set,
Whereat the people on the shore, who saw,
Laughed loud and long, but not contemptuously;
For none who looked upon the solemn face
Of him, her pilot, could revile the man,

Contrived by God in nature's noblest mould,
Who bore the stamp of character sublime.

So, passing Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez, safe,
They came one bright May morn to New Orleans.
The eyes of Abraham then first beheld
And marked the horrors of the awful trade
In human chattels — saw a maiden sold
In public vendue, auctioned to the man
Who bid the highest price and placed the gold
Upon the counter for the living thing.

A fair mulatto girl, with rounded limbs,
Robust and vigorous, as all might know,
Yet bidders pinched her flesh and made her run,
Like a young horse, before them at the sale,
That they might see, the vendor gravely said,
What they were buying was from blemish free.

Oh, wretched spectacle! 'twas doubtless there
The heart of Abraham was keenly pierced
With the sharp sword of sorrow for the race
In bondage, bartered like the helpless brutes.
For, turning sadly from the cruel scene,
Said he: "Oh, let us get away! By God,
If in the years to be there come a chance
To hit this monster, I will hit it hard!"
Long after, in the time appointed, lo,
God gave the moment, and he struck the blow!
Oh, awful thought, that over all the earth
The damning spell of slavery hath lain;
The heritage of savagery and lust,
Of those dark days when brutish force was law,
And might was miscalled right, and the strong man
Put shackles on the weaker, in the name

Of sweet religion, thinking that the God
Who hung Orion and the Pleiades,
Omnipotent, omniscient, merciful,
Approved in far-off heaven the monstrous deed.
Oh, curst be bondage in all time and space,
Of man to man, and whether shackles rest
Upon the brain or ankle, cursed still,
In ancient Egypt or in New Orleans.

BOOK III.

NEXT in New Salem Abraham appeared,
And to the curious ones who asked of him,
"Why cam'st thou hither?" thus did he respond:
"A piece of driftwood floating down am I,
Borne by the freshets and by accident,
Lodged in this village, waiting for the tide
To bear me outward thence and oceanward:
At last I hope to rest in the great deep."

Now, looking backward o'er his long career,
We see the wisdom of the Power that brought
The rude rail-splitter to the Sangamon.
Here first at the election did he check
The list of voters, and beguiled the crowd
With stories full of mirth and pointed wit.
Thus did the people come to learn of him,
And all felt drawn by his plain, honest ways.

So the physician of the town engaged
Him as a pilot to the Illinois;
But reaching Beardstown, there was he discharged,
And plodded to New Salem wearily.

There too came Offut also with his goods;
A mill he leased, and placed true Abraham
In charge of all his enterprises vast.
Expecting much of such good stewardship,
Him did he highly praise and boldly say:
"He is a man of great ability,

High his attainments and his prowess great.
Along the Sangamon there is no man
He cannot whip, outrun, or wrestle down;
I challenge all the country 'round about."

Then wildly spread the news to Clary's Grove,
Home of a motley crowd, half-civilized,
Good-natured, friendly, who could fight or pray,
Chaotic product of a frontier life.
Rough were they in their sports, yet to the sick
Or the defenseless merciful and kind.
They helped the widow, smoothed the orphan's way,
Relieved the feeble in their wretchedness,
But brooked no rivalry in love or war.

To one, Jack Armstrong, powerful and tall,
They yielded leadership, and boasted much
That he could master any man who trod
The banks of Sangamon. They cried, "Aha,
Let but this awkward Abraham come down,
And we will teach him how to fist and fight,
And roll his bony carcass on the ground,
Or ride him on a rail across the town.
If he be all that Offut claims for him,
Let him try muscle with our Armstrong great,
And if triumphant, then will we accord
To this new-comer rule in Clary's Grove."

Yet much averse was Abraham to this,
And would not go till Offut prayed of him
To fight the great Philistine of the grove.
Then came the contest, bruited through the place,
Whereon men staked their chattels old and new,
All sorts of property, each confident

His man was stronger, and that victory
Must come to him. Long did they struggle, till
True Abraham, suspicious of foul play,
Became enraged, and then, with mighty grasp,
The burly wrestler seized around the throat,
And swung him in mid-air before the throng,
Writhing in pain and ready to succumb.
So from that day did Armstrong and his kin
Cleave unto Abraham, and Clary's Grove
Bespoke his honor reverentially.

Meanwhile, on Offut's counter, when the day
With all its barter yielded to the night,
Would Abraham his long legs stretch, and read
With mind absorbed, intent, while 'round him men
Played cards, or drank, or slept, unthinkingly.

Much people questioned if the Sangamon
Would float a steamer in those early days,
So Vincent Bogue made proclamation wide
That he from Cincinnati would sail forth
To Springfield and the fertile land beyond.

Great was the joy of all the country round;
Men armed with axes fixed on handles long
Went forth, and with them honest Abraham,
To cut away the branches o'er the stream
And wave a welcome to the "Talisman."
At Springfield lying for a little while,
An honored guest, the falling waters told
The captain he must plan a quick retreat,
Or rest a pris'ner in the Sangamon.
So downward did he turn the "Talisman,"
And slowly sailed a good four miles each day.
New Salem reached, when, lo! she ran aground

On Rutledge dam; then, as in days agone,
There came the skilled and faithful Abraham,
Familiar with the shoals of Sangamon,
And by his wisdom piloted the boat
To Beardstown, bidding her a long adieu.

So in the years of tumult and distress,
When the old Ship of State struck on the rock
Of dark secession, came this Abraham,—
Pilot of Sangamon — and brought to port
That greater craft which held a nation's hope,
And steered his course by God's eternal stars,
Into the ocean of sweet liberty.

With the departure of the "Talisman"
The village of New Salem Offut left.
So like a piece of driftwood Abraham
Now floated on the restless flood of years,
Till the great chieftain Black Hawk dared to cross
The Mississippi with his warriors brave,
Destruction plotting unto old and young.
Whereat did Abraham enlist with those
Who kept the frontier, careless of their lives,
Forgetting self to save their fellow men,
Their wives and little children, from the fate
Of Indian warfare with its cruelty.

The captain of the company they chose
On this wise: — In two lines they formed and then
Aspirants for the leadership came forth;
Each in well-uttered speech told of the wars
In which he had won honor, and how great
His zeal and courage were to fight again.
Then would the men take place by him they sought
For captain; so spake many boastingly,

All anxious to be foremost in the fray.
Now one among them in real war had been,
And in his uniform saluted them,
Appearing soldier-like with martial mien;
Whereat a part, lured on by his attire,
His line preferred, and Abraham despaired
Of being captain, and stood still, cast down,
Yet not in jealousy, but honest pride,
And disappointment; whereupon his men
Cried, "Honest Abe, come forth and lead us on
To fight the Indians as ye Armstrong fought!"
Then fell they into line, and lo! the choice
Lay unto Abraham. So he went forth
New Salem's captain in the Black Hawk War.

It chanced one day, an Indian, weak and old,
Defenseless, hungry, strayed into the camp,
A letter bearing from the valiant Cass,
Of introduction and good character.
The rough frontiersmen, hating much his race,
Said, "Come, and let us kill him; he is but
A spy, to carry tidings to his chief.
The letter is a stupid forgery."
They clamored for his blood like thirsty beasts.
The tiger that looks out from human eye,
The wolf that lives within the heart of man,
These, cruel and relentless, sought his death.
But their good captain, Abraham the just,
In righteous indignation, interposed.
Sternly commanding, "No, it must not be!"
Spared the defenseless red man, whereupon
His soldiers sullenly, like angry hounds,
Went grumblingly into their barricades.

He sought New Salem when the war was o'er,
Ambitious to be leader as of old.
Declaring for Whig principles withal —
For the deep dredging of the Sangamon,
Protective tariff, and the nation's banks,
Free education and improvements grand —
He entered the arena where men strive
For honor and the leadership of state.
Then to the county voters he appealed,
Their ballots seeking, a quaint candidate:
Clad in "a mixed jeans coat, claw-hammer style,
Short in the sleeves," above his sinewy wrists,
Bob-tailed, ill-fitting, trousers skimped of cloth,
Pot-metal boots, and coarse hat made of straw.

'Twas at a public sale that first he spoke,
And as upon the platform rude he sat,
His turn awaiting, a rough fight ensued,
Among the people, in the multitude.
And seeing one, his comrade, in the grasp
Of a rude ruffian, almost overpowered,
The candidate, with one tremendous leap
Descended, seized and threw the burly brute
A good twelve feet, then to the platform went
And made his simple speech in homely phrase
But true, so that the people cried, "Hurrah
For 'Honest Abe!' Three cheers for 'Honest Abe!'"
So, clam'rously and long, whene'er he came
His neighbors shouted for him, since they knew
His honest ways, and loved him tenderly.

Yet still he strove in vain, and at the polls
The sovereign will, that falls like flakes of snow

In silence all the day, o'erwhelmed his hope,
That rose again triumphant, grand, sublime.

Then for a while he vended goods and bought,
But in his heart abhorred the ways of trade
And prospered not. He longed the law to woo;
So, in New Salem often would he sit,
Barefooted, 'neath some cooling shade, and pore
O'er Blackstone, Chitty, Coke, and Littleton,
Depositories of the awful will
Of generations; that slow growth of years
Unnumbered, heritage of time, that shapes
The conduct of the living and decides
The rights of unborn infants, silently.

Yet so unpromising a student he,
Upon the woodpile seated, book in hand,
That when old Godby chanced to pass that way,
And saw him proud as Cicero, he said,
"Great God Almighty!" and passed quickly by,
In him discerning not the advocate
Of future years, whose simple eloquence
Swayed nations in the forum of the world.

Then soon in justice courts he often plead,
Not for the fee but more for discipline,
The deepest satisfaction feeling when
He saw the triumph of the right o'er wrong.
Friend of the poor, protector of the weak,
Oft did his clients, in their gratitude,
Bless him for friendly counsel and advice.
Unnumbered stories did he freely tell,
And break thereby the dull monotony
Of legal study; glad'ning other lives,
And sunshine bringing into gloomy homes.

Nor did he lose his love for manly sports;
And often in his fairness would decide
Between his fellows, so none would complain;
For all in work or play called him the same
Plain, homely title, — only "Honest Abe."

Long were the lines he with his transit ran
While a surveyor for the frontier field;
Such his precision and his honesty
That all men trusted in his measurements,
The constant needle deeming no more sure
Than his true heart and piercing intellect.

Nor did ambition slumber in his breast,
And once again the people's vote he sought;
Within New Salem, 'long the Sangamon,
Held many tournaments, political,
With worthy rivals for the honored seat
In the Assembly; and 'tis said of him
That once in the campaign he chanced to come
Upon some stalwart harvesters, strong men,
Who gauged a candidate by bone and brawn,
Preferring strength to wily argument.
Their standard learning, Lincoln quickly seized
A cradle, reaping dext'rously and well.
He distanced those who undertook the race,
And won them thus by his strong leadership.

So ere the winter snows fell on the field,
And icy fetters stilled the Sangamon,
Elected, "Honest Abe" went forth to lead
The statesmen of the fertile Prairie State.

BOOK IV.

SING now, my muse, the passion grand and strong
Of that true life, a deep romance, and sad,
Whose memory a melancholy threw
O'er all the after years, until his death,
And wrote its record in his countenance;
So that whoe'er beheld him afterward
Could not forget until his dying day
The solemn look of sadness seated there.

He loved sweet Annie Rutledge, maiden fair,
With that deep ardor and ecstatic joy
That only comes to him who first beholds
The form of her who fills his heart's desire,
Whose presence is a spell ineffable,
An inspiration and a light divine.

A girl of beauty, by her winsome ways
She won the love of all both old and young;
A maiden of New Salem, pure and true,
Strong in the elements of womanhood,
The favorite of all with whom she walked,
The village princess, in their hearts enthroned.
Nor did her beauty make her vain or proud;
Of simple ways, industrious and kind,
The home she neatly kept, wherein she dwelt
With loving kin; the needle deftly plied,
So at the quiltings none could her excel;
While from the spelling-match she bore away,
In undisputed victory, the prize.

To her did Lincoln passionately turn,
Drawn by a power resistless, subtle, deep,
Oneness of spirit, mystic, wonderful;
A strange affinity of souls that beat
In unison, as though by fate attuned,
Each incomplete without the other's love.

So to the quiltings, do the legends say,
Strong Abraham walked oft with Annie fair,
And entered once the room wherein the quilt
Was sewed by nimble fingers, and sat down
Among the women, from the men apart,
Amid the ridicule and heartless jests
Of rivals angered by his ardent love,
And heeding not the keen, contemptuous looks
Of solemn spinsters, jealous of the girl.

There fervently he told her of his love,
The sweet, old story, old as human life,
That man hath told to woman and will tell
Till life shall perish and the dreary world
Roll cold and desolate along its orb.

Then throbbed her heart with pleasure, and her soul
Thrilled with the joy that only woman knows,
Loved by the spirit answering the call
That from her heart of hearts longs for response.

Thus did they love; he, strong and swarthy, tall
And powerful; she, fair and frail, blue-eyed,
A charming blonde, with hair of auburn hue;
Sweet-hearted, matron-like, and beautiful.

Then in her bosom raged the struggle old
'Twixt love and duty as it seemed to lie;

And sadly did she tell him in kind words,
That only maiden tenderness could speak,
How, ere she knew him, she had plighted love
With one who claimed her hand and would not yield,
The marriage urging at some future day;
Meanwhile the purest constancy he swore.
So sadly said she "Nay" to Abraham,
With breaking heart, but loyal to her vow,
Welcomed McNeil, his rival suitor bold,
And hoped to make him happy by the smile
Of woman's tenderness born not of love.

Then came a separation, and McNeil
Went eastward to his childhood's home again,
But, ere he took the journey came to her
He loved, and said, in tones of tenderness:
"Believe me, dearest, I have loved thee long
And ever shall love. Though afar from thee
I go, I shall return to claim mine own,
And lead thee hence, a fair and lovely bride."
More did he tell her; how when he was young
Forth from a home of want and penury
He went to seek his fortune; thinking then
The name his parents bore might do him harm,
He changed from McNamar unto McNeil.
How he had struggled much, as well she knew;
Accumulated riches, yet unknown
To all his kinsmen through the passing years,
For fear, if they his whereabouts should know,
They too might come to dwell in the new land
Ere he had won his honor and his wealth,
And by their ignorance and poverty
Forever blast his high ambitions all;

How in that eastern town where he had dwelt
Still lived his parents, feeble and infirm;
The voice of duty called him to their aid,
So thitherward he now must go in haste;
Then bade the girl a long and fond adieu.

Deep was the sorrow of poor Annie then,
Sad and forsaken seemed the lonely maid;
And there were those who in their wisdom said,
"Never again her lover will she see,"
And cursed the faithless McNamar, as grew
The weary weeks to months, and still there came
No tidings to the maiden in her grief.

Upon a steed that in the Black Hawk war
Had borne a soldier to the frontier wild,
Along the dewy roadway did McNeil
Ride eastward in the early autumn morn,
His destination the great Empire State.
Into Ohio slowly passed the youth,
Oft thinking of New Salem's maiden fair,
When suddenly his head began to throb
And all the trees seemed swaying o'er his path,
Although no wind was blowing on the lea,
And not a rustle whispered to the bough.
Thus reeling in his saddle, well for him
One tender-hearted chanced to pass that way,
A good Samaritan, like him of old,
Who loved his neighbor and by kindly deeds
The blessed law of brotherhood fulfilled.

His servant calling, tenderly they bore
Into their home the stricken traveler,
There kindly ministered unto his needs,
And watched beside him while the fever raged,

Moistened his parched lips and cooled his brow.
In wild delirium at times he tossed
And writhed upon his bed, and cursed the day,
Like Job of old, in which he saw the light;
Then often in the twilight would he lie
And watch the colored clouds of eventide,
Look westward wistfully and only say,
"Annie, my Annie!" oh, so plaintively,
That they who watched beside him turned away
In sympathy to drop the silent tear.
Yet none knew whence he came or fain would go.

New Salem's mail came weekly in those days,
Consigned to Abraham, postmaster there;
So few the letters to that little town
He truly said, he kept them in his hat.
With deep anxiety each name he read;
He hoped, yet feared, that some intelligence
Might come to her, the idol of his love;
Hoped joy for her, feared anguish for himself.
But weeks passed by and nought of tidings came
To faithful Annie in her loneliness;
And e'en her kin denied his constancy
Who thus would leave her with no word of love;
And so with cruel satire sharp said they,
"Pray, has thy lover dear come back to thee?"
"Where in the east does thy true lover dwell?"
Thus, taunting her whose life of wretchedness
Was filled with sorrow and hope long deferred,
They cursed the very name of McNamar.

Meanwhile the fever slowly ran its course;
The wasted form, pale and emaciate,
Bore slight resemblance to the ruddy youth
Who, in September, had New Salem left.

But, by and by, the pulses calmer grew,
And with the morning light his reason came,
While weary watchers sat beside his bed,
Ere chill November robed the hills with snow.
So afterwards did McNamar ride on,
The weary journey lasting many days,
Until at last he reached the older town
Where in his infancy he saw the light,
And dreamed in boyhood many golden dreams.
Here dwelt his father, near the close of life,
Bent with the weight of toilsome years, and gray,
Still longing for his absent son's return,
And daily praying he might see his face,
And press his hand once more ere death should call.

Full were his eyes with tears of gratitude
When the long lost returned to him again,
The tidings bearing of his great success
In the far country where the sun goes down.
Then tenderly the son cared for the sire;
But, slowly sinking day by day, he passed
Down the dark path that leads to the unknown;
And, when the snow lay round the cottage door,
Went forth, and left no track that man could trace.

So McNamar the son remained at home
And served his fatherless and widowed kin,
But wrote to Annie of his long delay.
So many letters passed between the two,
His more infrequent with the passing months,
Until at last no more from him she heard,
And still her love remained unsatisfied.

Thus, while the maiden waited, Abraham,
Believing McNamar would come no more,
Entreated her that she become his wife;

And as the villagers beheld the twain,
They prayed the honest suitor might prevail,
That he New Salem's fairest maid should win.

Then Annie faltered, loving Abraham
Though striving to be true to McNamar.
At first inflexible, at last she spake
The language of her heart and made reply:
"I love thee, truest, and will be thy bride,
On one condition; let me write to him
Who won my promise in the years gone by;
If he release me, then will I consent."
Then Abraham assented, for he loved
The girl too fondly to oppose her will.
To McNamar she wrote. Days turned to weeks,
Weeks passed to months, and still no answer came.
Then Lincoln triumphed o'er the absent one;
The maid consented, and the town was glad.

Still poverty deferred the marriage day
Till he could win a home for the fair bride,
She waiting patiently while he declared
That "nothing on God's footstool" them could part.
Meanwhile he toiled right manfully and well.
Then did he see in holy vision clear
The sweetest spot on earth — a home of love —
Where the true parents with the children dwell,
And loving service is a sacred song.

But often in her heart she felt the thrill
Of the old love with McNamar arise.
For first affection ever will transcend
In sweet romance the love of after years.

Then from her cheeks the rose tints passed away,
While, in their stead, a sickly pallor came;

And many wondered why the maid betrothed
Should be so sad before her marriage day.

Alas! ere autumn kissed the forest wild
And left its hectic glow on bush and tree,
Too weak to longer walk the fields, she lay
Near to the window, where the sere leaves fell,
And knew they soon would fall upon her grave.
E'en then her kinsfolk could not see her face,
Lest their solicitude should weary her;
Yet to the nurse she cried so plaintively
For Abraham, and looked so wistfully,
That the wise doctor said, "Bring in the man,
And let her look into his honest face.
Perchance more good than potions it may do."
So Lincoln came, and often she would sing,
For in her illness still her voice was clear,
And the last song that passed the maiden's lips
Was sung for him, her lover strong and true.

Meanwhile she weaker grew, until at last,
While Abraham was sitting by her bed,
All others slipped away and left them there
Alone but with the unseen angel, Death.
What in that mystic hour the maiden said,
What thoughts revealed, what pledge between them passed
In solemn mood, no mortal ever knew —
The deep arcanæ of that sacred hour.
It was the final meeting: she to death,
He to the world of action, sadly went;
And when the precious dust was buried there,
No greater funeral had the village seen,
For all who knew her loved her memory.

So deeply then did the sad lover mourn,
Men feared his saneness would be lost in grief.
Along the Sangamon, in dark despair,
He walked by night, and in the wood by day,
As if to find her spirit's trysting place,
And hold communion with the loved and lost.
So when the snow swept o'er her early grave,
Or murky clouds shed rain upon the sod,
His anguish was unspeakable and deep;
And many dreaded that in gloom his hand
Would end the life so precious unto all.
Then to kind Bowling Green they carried him,
And hoped new scenes and changes there might bring
Back to his face the happy look he bore,
When to the village years agone he came.
Then tenderly his friend watched over him,
And slowly kingly reason reign resumed;
So, strong in body, Abraham went forth.
Yet none who saw his countenance again
But read therein the traces of his woe.
Years passed away, and speaking of her grave
The strong man said, "My heart lies buried there."

In fame's arena now he bravely fought;
Vandalia beheld his great renown,
A rising star in the new world, ordained
To fill the land with light and liberty.

New Salem left, bound to the law he went
To Springfield, where he won the hand of her
Who shared his fortune and became his wife,
Though filling not the void that Annie left.

Strange was the courtship with this maiden fair,
Of queenly manner, self-reliant, proud,
In conversation fluent and refined,
A brown-haired belle, whose eyes of bluish-gray
Sparkled bewitchingly or flashed in rage.
Many there were who sought to win her love,
Among them Douglas, brilliant barrister,
Aristocratic, of patrician mien,
The opposite of Lincoln, awkward, plain.
Such were the rivals for the maiden's heart.

Often beside her Abraham would sit
In silent admiration while she spoke,
Held by an unseen power, resistless, deep,
Fixed by the fascination of her charms,
Enchanted by her presence beautiful.
So unto her he told his tale of love,
While, womanlike, she tortured him with doubt;
Till, satisfied he loved her honestly,
Responded with the word that made him glad.
Meanwhile had Douglas played the lover too,
And more she loved him than plain Abraham.
Then, in the silence of her soul, she sighed
For the old freedom of her maidenhood.
So deeply did she grieve that sickness laid
Its blighting hand upon her queenly brow,
And much she suffered in the agony
Of one whose words belie the heart's desire.

Then one who watched beside her tenderly,
The good physician, her confessor true,
With Douglas pleaded to withdraw his suit.
This done reluctantly, by him, the maid,
Grown strong, looked forward to her marriage morn.

Great were the preparations gladly made
By wealth and beauty for the bridal day.
That evening, brightly shone the mansion fair,
Where guests assembled waited with the bride,
Expectant, watching anxiously the hour
When he, the sad-faced bridegroom, should appear.
Long he delayed; no messenger could find
The recreant groom. Then, in her bitterness,
The bride, in spirit widowed, silently
Withdrew to hide the shame of injured pride.

Then, when they found him, scarcely did they know
The man, so changed he seemed, as if an age
Of sorrows had passed over him that night.
Plunged in an awful melancholy deep,
He walked "a man of sorrows," desolate.
So fearing he his life would fling away,
All instruments of death they safely hid;
While he in dark dejection brooded much,
And spoke so mournfully, men shook their heads,
His saneness doubted and his fate bemoaned.

But Time, the healer of all sorrows, passed,
And so there came a day when Lincoln met
Once more with Mary Todd, the brilliant, proud,
And pledged his love anew, with strong resolve,
The future trusting for a brighter day.
Then in November, when the air was chill,
"Trembling and pale, as if to slaughter led,"
Did Abraham go forth to wed his bride,
And in the little church the priest declared,
With solemn cadence, they were man and wife.
There stood old Brown, the honest frontier judge,
Who said whate'er he thought without restraint,

Accustomed to the simplest ways of life,
Reared in an air of Calvinism cold,
And unfamiliar with the ritual
And ceremony of the English church.
He, hearing Abraham slowly recite,
"With this ring, Mary, I thee do endow
With all my goods, lands, chattels, tenements,"
Ejaculated loudly in surprise,
"Why, God Almighty, Lincoln, that's the law!"

Then passed the man and woman through the door
To the new life, in which they twain were one
In sight of man and by the rule of church,
Whate'er the chasm that between them yawned.
E'en though she longed for Douglas, while he gave
His spirit to communion with the dead,
Sweet Annie Rutledge, loved and lost of yore.

BOOK V.

NOW many were the combats at the bar.
Courts owned his power, and juries wept before
The honest advocate, whose sure defense,
Or plea resistless, was eternal truth.
There Douglas, rival both in love and law,
Did Lincoln vanquish with the sword divine
Of godlike reason, wielded for the right,
So that the "Little Giant" could not stand,
With all his brilliant power and subtlety,
Before the gaunt, ungainly pioneer.
Thus was their future fate foreshadowed then.

Into his office once a client came,
Rehearsed his cause in low and earnest tones,
Till Lincoln, interrupting, thus broke out:
"Yes, we can doubtless gain your case for you;
Set a whole neighborhood at loggerheads,
Distress a widow and the fatherless,
The poor unfortunates, and get for you
Some hundred dollars and the legal costs;
To all of which you have a right at law,
But which, by the eternal equity,
Is hers. Some things are law that never can
Be right. Your case we will not take. This do:
You are a sprightly, energetic man;
Go forth and make the money honestly."
Such was the counsel of the lawyer just.

To him came Hannah Armstrong in her grief,
When the wild boy her mother heart so loved

Was tried for murder. Penniless and sad,
She begged for counsel, which he freely gave,
Pleading her cause before the jury there
With words of tender pathos, while he told
How, when he was a poor and friendless lad,
The Armstrongs kindly took him to their home,
Obscure and plain, and clothed and fed him there.
Recalling this, the tears stood in his eyes,
And the tall, trembling form grew eloquent.
So with his words pathetic did he win
The hearts of all the jurors, who forgot
The crime in admiration of the man,
And said, "Not guilty," of the luckless boy,
While the old mother wept in gratitude,
And gave her thanks — her lawyer's only fee.

Stronger each year he grew, learned and wise;
So that in contests fierce of brain with brain,
In legislative halls and courts of law,
He was the leader, none could him withstand;
Yet with no look of pride in his sad face
He marched to glory with advancing years.

At last he turned his eye to Washington;
A candidate for Congress 'gainst great odds,
Beholding Cartwright, preacher, pioneer,
A man of courage and true piety,
No mean antagonist in party strife,
A rival in the mighty tournament.
The character of Lincoln none could doubt;
But some there were who, in their bigotry,
Stood for the creeds and dogmas of the past,
Man-made and cruel, God-dishonoring.
These sought to place a shackle on the brain,
And said, "All doubt is of the devil born."

Such turned against him, and refused to vote
Against the preacher, whom the multitude
In all the country round had learned to love,
Observing not that, in his life sublime,
The statesman served the Master like the priest.

They called him "skeptic," him whose faith in God
And righteousness was ever calm and strong;
Not a small tribal God — a passing phase
In man's conception of his Deity,
But the One God, Soul of the Universe,
The Presence Immanent, Who guideth all.
Such was his God, Him did he love and serve,
In deep devotion to the deathless truth.
In that unbounded school — the Universe —
He learned the wisdom all alike must learn,
That selfishness is hell and discontent,
While sacrifice of self makes heaven within,
And they who lose themselves alone are saved.
He lived the life of love to God and man,
The mark of true religion in all times —
The world's immortal Sermon on the Mount,
Proclaimed alike by Buddha and the Christ —
The message of the master spirits all:
Beholding with a prophet's vision clear
The advent of a far-off better day
When love shall triumph over selfishness,
Dream of the good in every age and clime.

Into his honest heart there brightly shone
A revelation of the Will Divine;
Within his soul he heard the voice of God,
Clairaudient to the Eternal word;
He saw the good alike in old and new;

The wheat he garnered, left the wind the chaff.
His Bible was the boundless universe,
His Pentecost the long, long age of man.

True to the inspiration of his day,
He stood a servant of the God Most High,
And wrought sublimely out the Father's will,
As he beheld it through his conscience clear.
Ages shall know he did what seemed the right.
He heard the words, "Go forward!" and obeyed,
Though death lay in the path of duty stern.

The contest ended, Lincoln stood elect,
And, in the halls of Congress, grandly won
New laurels in his wreath of deathless fame.

Then came the days of tribulation great;
Big were the years with awful issues fraught,
Dark war-clouds gathered in the murky sky;
'Twixt North and South, in hate, the conflict waged,
Above the field of liberty for man.
Wise men there were who stoutly did maintain
That to the master should conceded be
The right to take his slave where'er he list
And hold him still a bondsman. 'Twas averred
By some the boundless West must ever be
Exposed to the accursèd system old,
Black with the guilt of ages numberless,
If so the state expressed its sovereign will.
In Douglas these a mighty leader found,
Magnetic, dashing, brilliant, powerful,
A master in the subtleties of words.
Then there were those who hated slavery,
But loved the Constitution, grand and old,

Who taught the Union dear must be maintained,
Whate'er the price of unity might be,
The West to freedom wholly consecrate,
Wherein no man should own his fellow man.
Of such was Lincoln, firm, invincible.

The matchless contest came to Illinois.
Here Lincoln fought with Douglas hand to hand,
And built his arguments impregnable
Upon the rocks of everlasting truth,
The sword of logic wielding with the clear
Unerring aim of him who sees the right,
And seeing, dares to bravely strike the blow.
Never in all the earth was such a strife;
There spirit fought with spirit, soul with soul,
Mind grappled mind, in the contention deep,
To solve the problem of the age sublime;
Till they who listened fancied that they stood
On high Olympus where the gods contend.

At Bloomington there fell upon the man
A light from the eternal Throne of Truth,
A brightness such as the Apostle saw,
Who erst had slain the saints of the Most High
Near by Damascus, where the angel stood;
A revelation from the Infinite.
Such the conviction that to Lincoln came,
Whereat his tongue was loosed, and lo! he spake
As one who breathes the living word of God,
His eyes afire with inspiration deep,
His heart aglow with equity and love.
In melting pathos plead he for the slave,
While in the tempest of his wrath he cursed
The burning sin of bondage bitterly.

On Galesburg never dawned so grand a day,
Or one so truly memorable, as that
When "Honest Abe" the "Little Giant" met
In hot debate and manly argument.
The heavens were somber, cold the wind and raw;
Yet thousands came from all the land around,
In patience standing, if they could but hear
The great opponents or their faces see;
So deeply did they feel for Fatherland
And think upon the issues of the hour.
Here Lincoln spoke with power and eloquence,
Such as old Rome and Athens never heard,
In the dear cause of human liberty.

Lo! flamed Donati's comet in the sky,
Weird visitor from far-off realms unknown,
As if the Power that moves the universe
And shapes the course of nations would display
In the celestial arch an oriflamme
To sign the advent of that glorious light—
"Lone Star of Illinois"—ascendant then.
Oh, if from interstellar space again
The blazing star look on the world below,
Ne'er shall its rays fall on a truer man,
The second Nestor of America,
Who walked the earth, and lives among the stars.

Thus, from each contest, Abraham came forth
Triumphantly and panoplied with power,
Like him who at Peniel did contend
And with an angel wrestled, saith the Book.
So did he pass in majesty along
The orbit of his awful destiny.

Then spread his fame o'er all the land afar,
Their champion millions did in him behold;

Ne'er was a king more fondly loved than he
By those who in his solemn face beheld
The image of the Father Infinite,
A son of God with destiny sublime.
So when the crisis came for them to choose
A leader for the nation, tried and true,
With one accord they turned to Abraham,
Ordained of God, devoutly they believed,
To lead them through the dreadful wilderness.

Oh, who shall pen the record of those days,
When brother fought with brother, and the land
Was red with blood and full of bitterness,
And Armageddon seemed on earth begun?
Ne'er was so fearful conflict seen below.
The ages looked from out the unknown past,
The world beheld the awful contest big
With destiny — the verdict of the race.

There, unseen by the feeble eye of flesh,
That sees the smoke above the millions rise,
The march of men, the carnage, and the blood,
Unheard by ears that hear the cannon boom,
The cry of death, the shout of victory,
The old contended fiercely with the new;
The right divine of kings, with liberty;
The tyrant with the freeman did contend.
There, godlike in his calmness, Lincoln stood,
While war and anarchy about him raged,
And social chaos seemed so imminent
That all who loved the Union stood aghast,
The issue fearing of the deadly fray.

And thus he piloted the Ship of State
So grandly through the tempest wild and long,
Steering his course by the eternal stars

Of truth and duty, equity and right,
No ruler owning but the Infinite.
He heard the voice of God within him speak
The higher law that makes for righteousness.
He felt the common brotherhood of man,
Born of the fatherhood of God, and loved
The most depraved and weakest of the race.

So when he saw the path of duty plain,
With the majestic mien of one who stands
In the effulgence of the Absolute,
And hears the voice of God speak the command,
And hearing, walks obediently thereto,
He spake the word that set the millions free
And banished from the New World slavery.

Dumb with the ecstasy of freedom found,
In him the poor untutored slave beheld
A second Moses, sent from God on High,
To lead the people out of bondage dark
Into the light of liberty and law.
So in their crude but heartfelt thankfulness
They gathered 'round him, hailed him as their Christ,
Their great Redeemer, praying God to bless
The "Massa President," and weeping tears
Of gratitude, unspeakable, profound.

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EMANCIPATION STATUE, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

BOOK VI.

OH, what a galaxy of friends had he!
A constellation of great, godlike minds:
The peerless Sumner, strong and uncorrupt,
Who walked the Senate with unblemished robe,
And fell the martyr of a righteous cause;
The rich-souled Beecher, priest of the Most High,
Who spake as with an angel's eloquence,
Friend of humanity, the full-orbed man;
Fremont and Phillips, Lovejoy, Garrison,
The grand apostles of sweet liberty,
Who dared to face the calumny and scorn
Of wealth and power for the poor shackled slave;
The outcasts of their day, now canonized,
Forsaken then, now lauded rightfully,
Whose statues honored stand where they were mobbed —
These stayed his lifted hands for liberty;
The noble spirits in his cabinet;
The mighty heroes, Sherman, Sheridan,
And great Ulysses,— that true trinity
Of martial men whose deeds shall ages sing;
And the Grand Army of the loyal brave,
Who offered life itself to save the land;
With noble women who, in lonely homes,
Prayed for the triumph of the Union hosts,
And wrought the answer of the earnest prayer
By lives of consecration, deep, sincere.

O precious Freedom, such the multitude
Whom Lincoln led in thy sweet, holy name
Through awful tribulation to success,
Through depths of dark despair to victory!
Ay, never beat a braver heart than his,
And yet so merciful; he hated war,
And sought the greater victory of peace.
With words of sympathy, with tears of love
And grief, with passionate appeal, he urged
His brothers to lay down the arms of strife,
And dwell together in fraternal love.

Not like the warriors of the older days,
Who fought for conquest and the victor's crown,
For carnage lusting in their cruelty,
Their castles building on the graves of men,
He fought but to insure a lasting peace;
He drew the weapon but to cleave the chain;
His the crusade for Law and Liberty.

So when the task Herculean was done,
Unlike Napoleon, the slave of self,
With crushed ambition, back from Waterloo
Bearing the story of his overthrow,
But with the benediction of the age
Resting upon him, did he gladly go
Forth to the seat of honor, blessing God
For the sweet calm and the dear Union saved.
So was he great in war, as great in peace,
The savior of his nation, friend of man.

Then did he hope to walk in tranquil ways,
In peaceful paths of civic life; to spend
With those he loved the autumn of his years,
In the sweet joy of duty truly done,

In the fruition of his highest hope —
The good of the dear land he loved so well.

The dark presentiment that twice had come
To her who loved him tenderly and well,
His second mother, o'er him threw its shade,
The solemn forecast of the awful fate,
The earthly destiny toward which he moved.
In somber mood, his eye prophetic saw
The karma of his tragic horoscope;
He walked as one who hears the knell of doom
Forever striking on the harp of life.

Then came the day that man will ne'er forget
While love of freedom dwells within the breast,
The blackest, saddest, since on Calvary
The Holy Son of God was sacrificed
And darkness fell upon the earth below,
While angels wept above the cruel cross.

It was the springtime, and the fields were glad
With a fair radiance, such as limners give
To the blest Eden, where, the legends say,
God walked with man when the round world was young,
Ere rested on the land the bitter curse.

Such was the day when with unwonted joy,
Unconscious that his mission here was done,
The man of doom went forth to destiny,
The burden lifted from his weary heart,
That held no malice toward his enemies,
Beholding through the rifted clouds of war
The blessed advent of the reign of peace.
Oh, strange that in the drama of a world
Judas should follow in the wake of Christ;

That He who meekly walked the weary way
In Palestine and by Gennesaret,
Who healed the sick and spoke the words of peace
To troubled souls, the fallen lifting up,
Bearing the burdens of His fellow men,
And doing good to all — ah, strange that He
Should tread the winepress of deep agony.
Yet not alone He walked, the Man Divine;
The long procession of heroic dead
Are His companions, and all noble souls
In every age Gethsemane have found.

So Lincoln stood in the gay theater,
A solemn figure in the merry throng
Who hailed his advent with a cry of joy,
The mighty hero of a glorious age,—
While the death angel, all invisible,
Walked by his side, and marked the day of doom.

An hour passed by. Beguiled by pleasing art,
The thoughtful statesman watched the moving play;
A kind nepenthe to the weary soul,
A respite to the eyes that long had gazed
Upon the drama of an awful war,
Big with the fate of freedom for the world.

Then nonchalantly the assassin came,
Looked at the stage with seeming interest,
Beheld, beneath the flag, the President
Beloved by millions, loving all mankind,
A smile celestial resting on his face;
Then swiftly sped with hellish zeal along
The path of sin smoothed by conspirators
Into the presence of the man beloved,
With the deep hatred of a frenzied soul,
That longed to kill, with thirst insatiate.

An instant, and the awful deed was done.
The martyr fell, while the assassin bold
Leaped to the stage. His glistening spur, meanwhile,
Caught in the blessed banner of the free
That marked the place wherein his victim lay,
Whereat he fell, and, falling, cursed the flag;
Then wounded rose, brandished his dagger, shrieked,
"*Sic semper tyrannis!*" then fled like Cain,
With the deep mark of guilt upon his brow,
While cried the blood of innocence to God.

Then the fierce anger of the nation raged
Against the murderer relentlessly.
"There was no waste so wide, no cave so deep,
As to give him a hiding-place secure,"
And daily, as he fled, his strength grew less.
Freighted with curses multitudinous,
The very air seemed poisonous to him;
He was an outcast in his native land;
Men, wild with fury, sought to take his life,
Ambitious to avenge the martyred one,
Who, had he spoken from the spirit world,
Had prayed the prayer of the sweet Nazarene,
"Father, forgive them," in that tenderness,
The difference 'twixt a savage and a Christ.

At last, the felon in a barn they found,
Still mad with frenzy and defiant still,
Unwilling to surrender, so they fired
The building, while the wretched man remained,
Beholding death in tragic ecstasy,
As one who glories in the end of life.

" His eyes, with terror lustrous, rolled and swelled
In beauty terrible; his forehead high
Was bloodless with the pallor of despair."
He cursed his captors as he stood at bay,
And raised his carbine with the last resolve
Of death; then fell, rebellious to the end,
And died, tragedian in an awful act,
His dust reposing in a nameless grave,
Touched by the holy mystery of death.

. . . . . .

Oh, who shall read the scroll of history,
And judge the actors in the play of years?
We backward gaze and see how some went forth
Triumphantly in what they thought the will
Of Him whose purpose none can ever thwart.
Of such, we say they were successful, great;
We glorify their deeds in eulogy,
And rear our monuments unto their fame;
We sing their pæans in majestic verse
And generations bless their memory.
'Tis well. But what of the misguided souls?
Alas, they followed what appeared to them
The true and living light. 'Twas but the gleam
Of baleful exhalations treacherous;
A will-o'-the-wisp, alluring to destroy;
An *ignis fatuus* that led them on
Into sepulchral darkness, and was lost
Above the marshes and unfathomed mire
Where corpses rest. The light that marks the dead
They saw, and followed to destruction dire;
Mistook the comet for the constant star;
Veered from the path of safety and were lost.

Oh, what of these, the honest ones, but wrong,
Who piped the tones discordant in their day,
Yet heard no discord in their listening ears?
Oh, what of them? Is there no anthem still
For them to sing? Is there no light to fall
Upon their path? Yea, we may hope that He,
Omniscient Spirit of the universe,
Who plans in wisdom, loses not one soul;
And they who seem to sink in darksome night
Shall come at last into the perfect day,
And sing the harmony that is to be;
So what seemed wrong prove but a part of right
In the great scope of cycles infinite.
Call these not lost—no soul is lost, to God.

. . . . . .

Then fell an awful sorrow o'er the land,
As though the sun had set at noontide hour.
The reign of death,— a wail in every home;
Bells tolled the nation's loss, the flag drooped low,
"Men met in silence, pressed the hand and wept,"
The mart was still, and trade and pleasure dumb.
In North and South, forgetting party strife,
Great throngs assembled as with one consent,
While orators rehearsed the tragic tale
And dwelt upon the virtues of the dead.
So never mourned a nation of the earth
With lamentations deep and agonized,
In all the ages of historic time.

Then westward tenderly they bore the dust,
"States his pallbearers," and the anthem sung
By deep-toned cannon, as from place to place,
The vast cortége moved on in solemn state,
From Washington to Springfield, his old home.

Here in the hall where years before he hurled
His accusations against slavery
They placed the body of the honored dead,
That they who knew him ere the nation claimed
His precious presence might look once again
Upon the deeply furrowed countenance,
With all the people in their bitter woe.

There all the day and through the solemn night
The long procession passed that silent form,
A motley throng from all the walks of life,
The rich and poor, the high and low alike,
Together melted in the common grief.
Then on the morrow, while sweet voices sang
"Peace, Troubled Soul," gently the casket lid
They closed forever, and bore thence the dead
To Oak Ridge, and laid down the precious dust,
While millions mourned and blessed his memory.

Call him not dead, the hero cannot die;
His a renown imperishable, wide,
The grandest since the lowly Nazarene
Walked calmly from the Kingship to the Cross,
In self-renunciation, full, divine.
He leadeth now in the resplendent host
Of martyred ones, whose blood is eloquent
For the emancipation of the race
From every form of slavery and sin,
For the true life of love and liberty.
Such cannot die; they live forevermore
In the dear story of humanity,
Transfigured on the mount of gratitude,
And their true spirits upward move, we trust,

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AUGUSTUS ST. GAUDENS

STATUE OF LINCOLN, LINCOLN PARK, CHICAGO.

To higher forms of life, in the sublime
Arena of the ages infinite.

O mighty spirit, let the ages sing
Thy requiem and æons chant thy praise.
'Tis holy ground whereon thy feet have trod
Obediently the path of duty hard,
Whereto He called thee, valiant son of God.
Thine was the grander faith, the wider hope,
That right shall triumph over waning wrong,
That sin shall perish, and the universe
Be purified, and God be All in All.
And so, like Moses through the wilderness,
Thou ledst a people to the land of peace,
The heritage of freedom, blessed boon;
And thy keen eye beheld the brighter day,
The vision of a Union saved, secure,
The fair Republic, pride of all the earth,
Yet might not enter, for the Father called
Thy spirit to the better land unseen.

Farewell, O noble son of God, farewell!
In that bright sphere where passion may not bide,
The fleshly limitations swept away,
No taint of ill to thy true soul can come,
Pure spirit, in the realm of the Great Power
Whose purpose through the ages slowly makes
For righteousness, which thou didst truly love.
Pass to the empyrean heights — Farewell!